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Exploring marginalised communities with online student portfolios using Google Drive and TEDx Talks

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Abstract. Two university writing classes ($N=49$) in Japan completed three writing tasks that focused on marginalised communities utilising Google Drive and TEDxKyoto Talks as part of a writing portfolio assessment. Participants also completed a voluntary reflective survey. The reflective survey results indicated that students demonstrated an increased awareness of the communities discussed and a desire to undertake further similar exercises. Furthermore, the portfolio responses indicated that the students were capable of tackling complex topics effectively in the L2 writing classroom when combining TEDx Talks with Google Drive. This indicates that tasks which focus on issues of social importance utilising Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) inside the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing classroom can be both pedagogically and socially meaningful.

Keywords: Google Drive, Google Docs, marginalised communities, TEDx Talks, unstructured writing.

1. Introduction

Building upon a pilot study by Perez (2018), three writing tasks were completed utilising Google Drive and TEDx Talks as part of an unstructured writing portfolio assessment for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) majors in Japan. The tasks aimed to increase content diversity in the L2 writing classroom by focusing on three marginalised communities: multiracial Japanese, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ), and women.

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Such activities may be viewed as advantageous when we consider Geuna and Shibayama's (2015) observation of marginal female representation within STEM disciplines in Japan, in which women comprised 31% of bachelor graduates and 25% of PhD graduates. Similarly, EFL resources continue to favour heteronormativity (Erlman, 2020) and Japan's multiracial populace only represents a small fraction of the overall population (Törngren & Sato, 2019).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Two EFL writing classes consisting of lower-intermediate to intermediate-level second-year university students ($N=49$; Class A=24, Class B=25) majoring in STEM disciplines in Japan completed three portfolio writing tasks. Before undertaking these tasks, signed consent was obtained from the students that collected data may be used for research.

2.2. Instruments

The following instruments were utilised.

2.2.1. TEDx Talks

Three TEDxKyoto Talks were selected to provide country-specific content: Megumi Nishikura: *Explorations into being hafu*³; Patrick Linehan: *Embracing Different*⁴; and Ikumi Yoshimatsu: *Fighting for new laws to protect women in Japan*⁵.

2.2.2. Writing prompts

- Consider Nishikura Megumi's TED Talk. She says that multiracial people in Japan face a lot of discrimination. Do you think her depiction of the struggles multiracial people face in Japan is accurate or exaggerated? Why?

3. <http://www.ted-ja.com/2014/08/explorations-into-being-hafu--megumi-nishikura-at-tedxkyoto.html>

4. <http://www.ted-ja.com/2014/03/embracing-different--patrick-linehan-at-tedxkyoto-2013.html>

5. <http://www.tedxkyoto.com/en/events/tedxkyoto-2015/fighting-for-new-laws-to-protect-women-in-japan-ikumi-yoshimatsu-tedxkyoto>

- Patrick Linehan briefly describes the discrimination he experienced throughout his life for being gay. Think about LGBTQ people in Japan. What kinds of discrimination do they experience? What do you think their situation will be like 20 years from now?
- In this TEDx Talk, Yoshimatsu Ikumi discusses various forms of harassment that women face in Japan. She explains that this is not uncommon for women all over Japan. Do you think harassment of women is likely to decrease in the near future? Why – OR – why not?

2.2.3. *Reflective survey*

Using Google Forms, volunteers answered four 6-point Likert scale (6 strongly agree ~ 1 strongly disagree) items (see [Table 1](#)). A descriptive statistical analysis of the results was conducted using the analytical software SPSS 25.

2.3. Procedure

A Google Doc for each student was created by the instructor in Google Drive. The document was then shared with the appropriate student.

Students viewed a TEDx Talk with subtitles (or translation) every other week using individual laptops in the classroom. Next, they had five minutes for planning on a worksheet containing the writing prompt, in Japanese or English. Fifteen minutes was then allotted in class to type responses in the Google Doc portfolios, where the instructor had also added the prompt. Students were instructed that any structure or opinion was acceptable, but they should adhere to class formatting rules. They were then able to refine the writing outside of class, up to 200-250 words.

Finally, those who were willing ($N=47$) answered the anonymous reflective survey in class once the activities had concluded.

2.4. Data analysis

To explore how well students completed the tasks, their responses were analysed for one of two main opinions based upon the writing prompt. An overall total for both classes (N) was calculated along with individual class totals (A and B). Responses that did not clearly answer the writing prompt were marked as ‘unclear’ and no further analysis was undertaken. Next, the rationalisations for each main opinion were coded into the major recurrent themes across both classes.

Descriptive statistics from the reflective survey were analysed to ascertain reception of the activities and whether students believed they had gained any insight during the tasks.

3. Results and discussion

Results indicated that a large majority of students were able to complete the writing tasks appropriately, drawing upon both the TEDx Talks and their own knowledge. However, the topic about multiracial Japanese produced the largest number of unclear responses ($N=8$), perhaps indicating that further activity development could be beneficial in this area. Interestingly, both sides of this topic were supported with anecdotal personal experience as support.

Students answered most uniformly and with the least amount of unclear responses ($N=1$) in regard to their belief that positive change would come to the LGBTQ community in Japan ($N=42$). The high-profile coverage that LGBTQ issues had recently received, as well as on-campus events that focused highly on LGBTQ issues may have influenced this result (Perez & Jolley, 2020).

Only three students responded unclearly for the Yoshimatsu (women) writing prompt, with 27 students indicating a belief that harassment of women would decrease in the future. However, Class A, with a larger male population ($F=4$, $M=20$), demonstrated more support for this notion than Class B, which had greater gender diversity ($F=14$, $M=11$). This is interesting when understood against the backdrop of the 2020 *Global Gender Gap Report* (Crotti, Geiger, Ratcheva, & Zahidi, 2020), which ranked Japan 121st out of 153 surveyed nations, perhaps indicating that the male populace might not fully grasp the struggles women face.

It is posited that using the country-specific content provided by TEDxKyoto Talks facilitated greater understanding of the communities addressed, which aided in the high degree of task completion for these complex topics. Further, as Slavkov (2015) states, Google Drive affordances allow for effective management of activities for students and instructors alike. In particular, as observed by Nurmukhamedov and Kerimova (2017), the maintenance of writing portfolios by students can be improved significantly by using Google Drive. Accordingly, it also helped avoid problems related to forgotten work or absences during these portfolio activities.

Results show that students felt the portfolio work enabled them to learn more about social minorities (see Table 1). This corresponds with the students' survey answers

after each task (Perez & Jolley, 2020) and is also reflected in some of their written responses:

“I had never thought about whether they feel bad by being mistaken as foreigners”.

“And, I have never thought about it before watching the video”.

“Because of watching TEDx Talk, I was able to understand the damage of women’s power harassment, sexual harassment, and rape”.

Furthermore, students felt positive about using TEDx Talks in conjunction with writing tasks and expressed interest in their use elsewhere, corresponding with Perez’s (2018) findings.

Table 1. Reflective survey

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
By working on the fluency writing portfolio using TED Talks, I was able to learn more about social minorities in Japan, such as Nishikura, Linehan, and Yoshimatsu, and the struggles they face.	47	4.91	.905
I like using TED Talks as the basis for my fluency writings.	47	4.49	1.249
I would like to do assignments like these in other English classes.	47	4.38	1.243
This fluency writing portfolio helped me to develop my ability to write in English.	47	4.43	.903

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that TEDx Talks and Google Drive offer teachers an effective method of introducing writing activities that aim to increase content diversity within the classroom. Private unstructured writing portfolios further allow students a low-risk opportunity to express themselves on complex topics of social importance.

Students within this study, supported by Google Drive affordances, displayed an ability to complete their portfolios by drawing upon their knowledge and experiences from outside the classroom in collaboration with the content from the

TEDx Talks. However, further activity development is recommended to not only encourage greater critical thinking but to also practise other skills. Importantly, a majority of students were receptive to the activities in this study and the potential for other similarly focused tasks.

In the future, it would be interesting to see insights gained from larger cohorts and faculties as well as international locations.

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